

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00
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PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 HA-05
SSM-03 CCO-00 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 OMB-01 /094 W
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O R 241748Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 2167
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN NY
USMISSION SINAI
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4066

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV PINT IS
SUBJ: ME STAFF GROUP - WEIZMAN'S CALL FOR NATIONAL UNITY
GOVERNMENT

REF.: TEL AVIV 3949, TEL AVIV 4016

1. SUMMARY. WEIZMAN'S CALL FOR A NATIONAL UNITY
GOVERNMENT IS A CLEAR CHALLENGE TO BEGIN. IT IS ONE
OF MANY DEMANDS FOR A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT, BUT NONE
OTHER IS SUCH A NAKED POWER PLAY. THE TIMING OF
WEIZMAN'S MOVE IS PROBABLY GOVERNED BY HIS PERCEPTION
OF THE FAILURE OF BEGIN'S DISCUSSIONS IN WASHINGTON.
IT APPEARS THAT ACT MAY HAVE BEEN IMPETUOUS AND THAT
WEIZMAN DID NOT THINK THROUGH ITS CONSEQUENCES. BEGIN
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CAN REACT TO THE CHALLENGE IN SEVERAL WAYS, BUT OUR
JUDGEMENT IS THAT HE WILL CAREFULLY STUDY THE LOCAL
POLITICAL SCENE BEFORE MAKING HIS COUNTER MOVE. THE
KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF WEIZMAN'S MOVE WILL PROBABLY BE
EHRlich AND THE LIBERALS. WE BELIEVE BEGIN WILL WEATHER
THIS CHALLENGE IN THE SHORT TERM AFTER A PERIOD OF
INTENSE POLITICAL ACTIVITY, AND WEIZMAN'S REPUTATION

FOR RECKLESSNESS WILL BE REINFORCED. THE LONGER TERM
OUTCOME IS LESS PROMISING FOR BEGIN. END SUMMARY

2. WEIZMAN HAS POSED HIS CALL FOR A "NATIONAL PEACE
GOVERNMENT" IN TERMS OF THE NECESSITY TO MEET THE
CHALLENGE FROM THE US, BUT IT IS OBVIOUS THAT IT IS
REALLY A CHALLENGE TO BEGIN. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT
WEIZMAN'S CALL IS ONE OF MANY FOR A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT.
LABOR HAS ANNOUNCED ITS INTENTION TO CALL FOR A VOTE OF
NO CONFIDENCE NEXT WEEK; MAPAM HAS ALSO CALLED FOR A
NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT; MK HILLEL SEIDEL (LIKUD)
HAS CALLED FOR A NEW COALITION; AND A NUMBER OF EDITORIALS
AND COMMENTARIES MAKE THE SAME DEMAND. THUS, WEIZMAN
HAS EXPRESSED WHAT MANY OTHERS IN THE POLITICAL SCENE
ARE DEMANDING, ALTHOUGH OBVIOUSLY HIS DEMAND IS MORE
SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE HE SEES HIMSELF AS THE LEADER OF
SUCH A COALITION GOVERNMENT DESPITE PROTESTATIONS OF
LOYALTY TO BEGIN. IT IS A NAKED POWER PLAY.

3. NO DOUBT THE TIMING OF WEIZMAN'S MOVE WAS
GOVERNED BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S WASHINGTON VISIT.

THE CARTER-BEGIN DISCUSSIONS ARE SEEN HERE TO HAVE BEEN
A DISASTER AND THE PEACE PROCESS CLOSE TO FLOUNDERING.
WEIZMAN HAS APPARENTLY DECIDED PRECIPITOUSLY TO MOVE
AT A TIME WHEN BEGIN IS PERCEIVED TO HAVE FAILED AND
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HE (WEIZMAN) IS RECEIVING WIDESPREAD FAVORABLE NOTICES
BECAUSE OF LEBANON - THUS, THE PRIME MINISTER IS DOWN
AND HE IS UP. (THIS VIEW IS SUPPORTED BY THE MOST RECENT
PORI POLL, WHICH WAS TAKEN PRIOR TO BEGIN'S US VISIT.
IT SHOWED 88.7% OF RESPONDENTS GENERALLY APPROVED OF
WEIZMAN'S PERFORMANCE AND 69.9% OF BEGIN'S. SEE SEPTTEL.)

4. BEGIN CAN REACT IN ONE OF SEVERAL WAYS. (A) HE
COULD RESIGN AND LEAVE POLITICS, ALTHOUGH WE THINK THAT
MOST UNLIKELY. (B) HE COULD TRY TO BRUSH
ASIDE WEIZMAN'S CALL AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE MINISTER'S
PRIVATE OPINION. WE THINK THAT IS ALSO UNLIKELY, BECAUSE
BEGIN CANNOT NOW IGNORE ALL THE DEMANDS FOR GOVERNMENT
CHANGE. (C) BEGIN COULD ASSOCIATE HIMSELF WITH WEIZMAN'S
CALL FOR A BROADER COALITION AND TAKE IT OVER AS HIS OWN
IDEA, NOTING HIS PREVIOUS SUPPORT FOR A NATIONAL UNITY
GOVERNMENT AND HIS INVITATION TO LABOR LAST FALL TO JOIN
HIS COALITION. (D) OR, HE COULD MEET WEIZMAN HEAD ON,
EITHER BY TRYING TO FORCE HIM TO RESIGN, OR RESIGNING
HIMSELF AND BRINGING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT AND CALLING FOR
NEW ELECTIONS. OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT HE WILL CHOOSE THE
THIRD COURSE (C). THI IS CONFIRMED BY BEGIN'S

COMMENT WITH A HINT OF SARCASM ON HIS RETURN TO ISRAEL
THAT OF COURSE ISRAEL ALREADY HAS A PEACE GOVERNMENT AND
WEIZMAN IS PART OF IT.

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5. BEGIN'S INITIAL COUNTER MOVE COULD COME AS EARLY AS
SUNDAY, MARCH 26, IN THE CABINET MEETING. HE WILL MOVE
QUICKLY TO ASSESS THE VIEWS OF OTHER POLITICAL LEADERS
AND MAY MAKE HIS COUNTER ATTACK WITHOUT DELAY IF HE
DETERMINES WEIZMAN DOES NOT HAVE MUCH SUPPORT. IF HE
FINDS WEIZMAN HAS CAREFULLY PREPARED THE GROUND (WHICH
WE DOUBT) AND HAS WIDE SUPPORT, HE MAY SAY HE IS
GIVING THE SUGGESTION CAREFUL THOUGHT WHILE HE ASSESSES
THE FULL EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE AND PREPARES HIS NEXT
MANEUVER. EVEN IF BEGIN SURVIVES THIS PARTICULAR
ATTACK, HE WILL NOW SEE WEIZMAN AS A CONSTANT THREAT
AND PERSONAL ENEMY.

6. THE EXTENT AND DEPTH OF WEIZMAN'S SUPPORT IS DIFFICULT
TO GAUGE AT THIS POINT. WE KNOW WEIZMAN HAS TALKED TO
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PERES AND OTHER LABOR LEADERS, BUT WE DO NOT KNOW THAT ANY FIRM AGREEMENTS WERE REACHED. LABOR WOULD BE PREPARED TO JOIN A NEW GOVERNMENT ONLY IF BEGIN WERE NOT PRIME MINISTER, IF THEN. LABOR LEADERS HAVE SAID THEY WERE INTERESTED IN A CHANGE OF POLICY NOT PERSONALITIES. THE DMC COUNCIL WILL MEET EARLY NEXT WEEK; IT IS EXPECTED TO DISCUSS A MOTION TO QUIT THE COALITION (AN EARLY DCM REACTION IS REPORTED BY SEPTTEL). SUCH A MOVE WOULD HELP WEIZMAN AND CONCEIVABLY BRING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT. THE KEY TO WEIZMAN'S CHANCES WILL PROBABLY BE EHRLICH AND THE LIBERALS - IF THEY ARE IN WEIZMAN'S CAMP, HE MAY BE ABLE TO OVERTURN THE GOVERNMENT. THE MAN IN THE STREET WILL PROBABLY RALLY TO BEGIN, ALTHOUGH THE DECISION WILL MOST LIKELY BE MADE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF POLITICAL PARTY AND CABINET DECISIONS, UNLESS BEGIN CALLS FOR NEW ELECTIONS.

7. AT THE MOMENT, WE WOULD BET (BUT NOT BY A WIDE MARGIN) ON BEGIN SURVIVING WEIZMAN'S ONSLAUGHT IN THE WEEKS AHEAD. THERE WILL BE A GREAT DEAL OF DEBATE AND ACTIVITY, BUT WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARS, BEGIN PROBABLY WILL STILL BE PRIME MINISTER AND WEIZMAN WILL STILL BE DEFENSE MINISTER, BUT WITH HIS REPUTATION FOR RASHNESS REINFORCED. BEGIN WILL KNOW, OF COURSE, THAT IT WILL ONLY BE A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE EZER TRIES AGAIN. BEGIN CANNOT FIRE WEIZMAN (UNDER THE ISRAELI SYSTEM, MINISTERS CAN RESIGN BUT CANNOT BE DISMISSED) SO HE MAY TRY TO BRING HIM TO HEEL BY USING THE HERUT PARTY MACHINERY. THIS DOES NOT BODE WELL FOR THE FUNCTIONING OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND ITS CHANCES FOR SURVIVAL OVER THE LONG HAUL ARE MUCH LESS CERTAIN. VIETS

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